

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Southern Montana Telephone Utility Easement
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2019
Proponent:	Southern Montana Telephone Company
Location:	Sections 28, T4S – R15W (Capital Building Trust)
County:	Beaverhead County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proposed action is to install an underground telecommunications fiber optic cable to upgrade their current facilities and services to the Jackson Exchange serving in and around Jackson Montana. The work will follow an existing access road to the Peterson Ranch. The improvements would offer state –of –the-art telecommunications toll and distribution facilities, as well as future growth capabilities for the company and the community.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

A field review was conducted in April, 2019 by DNRC Unit Manager Tim Egan.

Letters were sent to the following seeking comments for the proposed telecommunications cable installation:

DNRC, Archaeologist, P. Rennie

Montana Natural Heritage Program

The following Lessees; Forty Bar Ranch –(lessee)

Beaverhead County Commissioners

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Biologist, Vanna Boccadori

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Program has approved this proposal with mitigation measures of controlling noxious weeds and invasive plant species, including cheatgrass and Japanese brome.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action Alternative: Grant Southern Montana Telephone Company a 20-foot-wide easement over approximately 0.726 acres of State land in Beaverhead County near Jackson, Montana for the purpose of installing an underground telecommunications fiber optic cable.

No Action Alternative: The State would deny an easement to Southern Montana Telephone Company. The proponents would be required to find an alternative route, or not install the underground telecommunications fiber optic cable at the proposed location.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain **POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS** following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

Action Alternative: The footprint of this project is small, 20 feet wide, by 1,580' long along an existing road right-of-way easement to the Forty Bar Ranch headquarters buildings. The soils where the disturbance would occur have been disturbed in the past and have revegetated with native grass species. The fiber optic cable will be plowed in with a vibrating arm on a dozer with little or no impacts to soil quality, stability or moisture. There are no unusual geologic features on this section and no long term or cumulative impacts are anticipated from this proposal to soils in the project area.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to soils would occur under this alternative.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Action Alternative: The proposed action will not impact any perennial or intermittent streams on DNRC lands. The ground where the cable will be installed is flat along an existing road and no erosion or delivery of sediment to streams would be anticipated. No impacts to water quality would occur under the action alternative.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to water quality would occur under this alternative.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will have any long term or cumulative impacts to air quality in the Jackson, Montana area.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Action Alternative: A NRIS search didn't reveal any rare or endangered plant species within the project area. The area has been disturbed in the past and the disturbed areas have re-vegetated nicely. There will be some new vegetative disturbance associated with this project during the installation of the underground telecommunications cable. Disturbed areas will need to be monitored for weeds and or invasive grasses and sprayed with herbicide if weeds are found. The area is relatively weed free at this time.

No Action Alternative: There would not be any impacts to vegetative cover under this alternative.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Action Alternative: A variety of big game, small mammals, raptors, songbirds and sage grouse potentially use this area. Due to the short duration of the installation period, the location being along an existing right-of-way with daily use and the new fiber optic cable being buried, minimal impacts to wildlife and their habitat are anticipated from this alternative.

No Action Alternative: This alternative would have no impacts to terrestrial, avian or aquatic life or their habitats.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Action Alternative: The project location lies within identified general sage grouse habitat. The proponent applied for and received permission from the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program to perform the installation of the fiber optic cable in the Jackson area with mitigation measures of controlling noxious weeds and invasive grasses. There is a sage grouse lek less than a mile from this proposed installation, and nesting can occur within 3 miles of the proposed project. The Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks wildlife biologist suggests the following mitigation measures:

1. Disturb as little ground as possible.
2. Treat any weeds in the area to be disturbed before and after disturbance
3. Avoid any disturbance May 1 – June 30.

An NRIS search didn't identify any other threatened or endangered species within the project area. Occasional use of the area by gray wolf could potentially occur but is generally considered outside of their normal occupied habitat. Preferred habitat for lynx and wolverine and arctic grayling is not present within the project area however any of the animal species could be seen crossing the driveway where the cable would be buried. Arctic Grayling can be found in the Big Hole River which is approximately ½ mile from the project area. Because the cable will be underground it will not impair the movement of any of these species. No long term or cumulative impacts would be anticipated to any unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to any unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources would occur under this alternative.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Action Alternative: A Class III cultural and paleontological resources inventory of the proposed cable route was conducted in 2008. No cultural or paleontologic resources were identified during the course of inventory. The proposed development will have *No Effect* to *Antiquities* as defined under the Montana State Antiquities Act. A formal report of findings has been prepared and is on file with the DNRC and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to cultural resources would occur under this alternative.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Action Alternative: The proposed project area is in a sparsely populated location. Short term disturbance will occur along an existing right-of-way corridor. Ground disturbance will be minimal, and of short duration. Once the disturbed areas are re-vegetated there will be no long-term effect to the aesthetics of the surrounding area.

No Action Alternative: No impacts to aesthetics would occur under this alternative.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

No other known environmental documents pertinent to the area are being evaluated or written for the project area.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will have impacts on the human health or safety of people living within the project area, or the surrounding Jackson, MT community.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will have any impacts on commercial and agricultural activities in the surrounding area.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will have any impacts on quantity and distribution of employment in the Jackson area.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will have any impacts to local or state tax base or revenue.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will impact the demand for government services to the surrounding area.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

There currently aren't any locally adopted environmental or zoning laws in this area.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will impact access to and quality of recreational use or wilderness activities in the surrounding area.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

There will be no measurable cumulative impacts related to population and housing due to the relatively small nature of this project.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Neither of the proposed alternatives will impact social structures and mores of the surrounding area.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Neither of the proposed alternatives will impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of the surrounding area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The proposed project has provided \$50.00 of application fees and would provide an additional \$907.50 of revenue to the Capital Buildings trust. (0.726 acres x \$1,250.00/ acres) In addition the project would provide state of the art telecommunications to the Jackson, MT area which could provide additional commerce to this isolated location.

**EA Checklist
Prepared By:**

Name: Tim Egan
Title: Dillon Unit Manager

Date: May 20, 2019

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected the Action Alternative and recommend the easement application be presented to the Board of Land Commissioners for approval.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Significant impacts are not expected to occur as a result of the proposed activity. The tele communication line will be installed along an existing road corridor and consequently the site has been previously disturbed. There will be temporary and short-term disturbance of vegetation and during the installation process, but natural re-vegetation is expected to occur as it has in the past. Mitigation measures for sage grouse protection include the following

1. Disturb as little ground as possible.
2. Treat any weeds in the area to be disturbed before and after disturbance.
3. Avoid any disturbance May 1 – June 30.
4. Monitor and spray for noxious weeds and invasive grasses if they occur.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:☐

EIS

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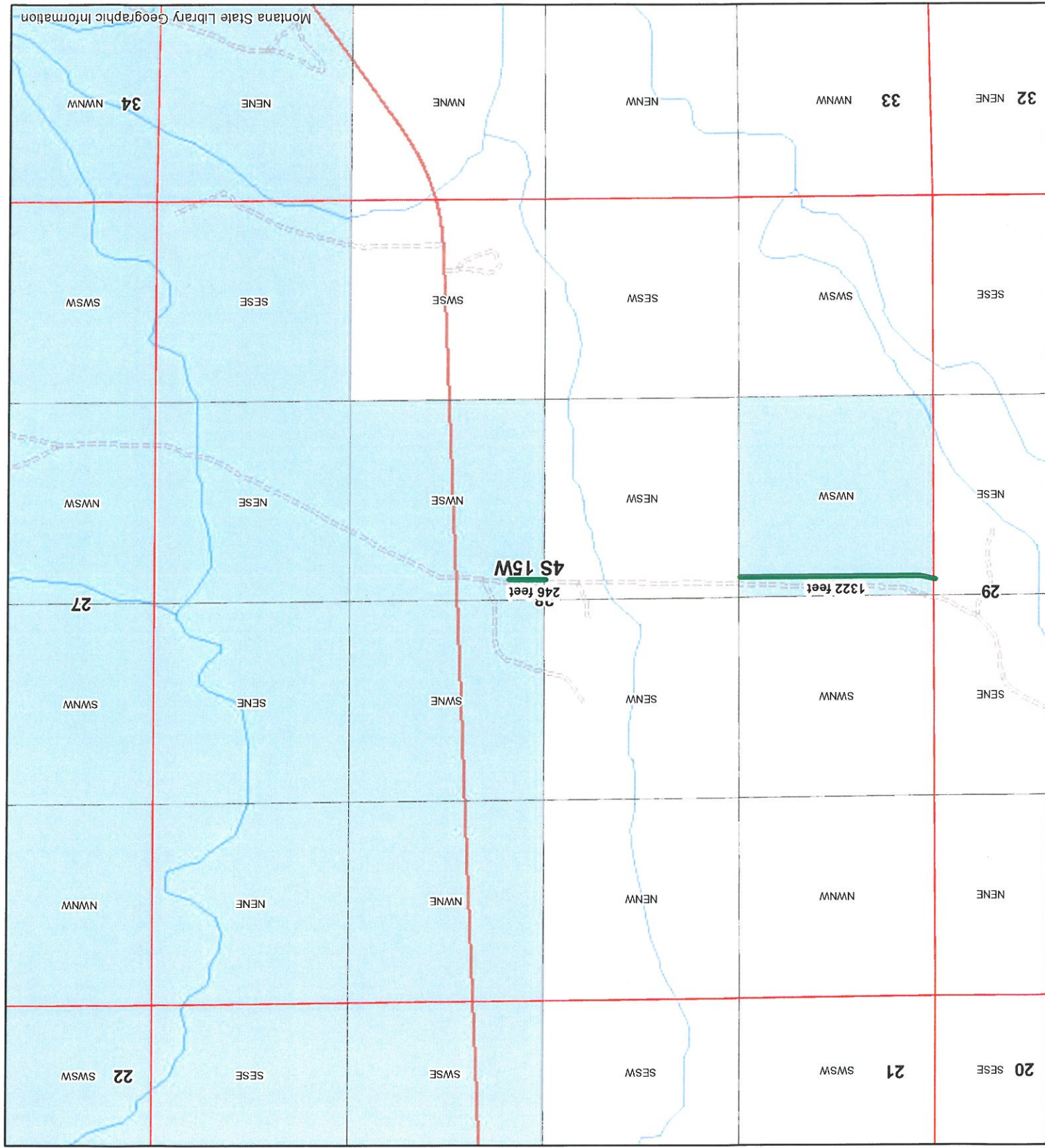
More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Andy Burgoyne
	Title: CLO-Trust Land Program Manager
Signature: 	Date: 5/20/19

**Southern Montana Telephone Company
Proposed Utility Easements
Sec 28, T4S R15W Beaverhead County, Montana**



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